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# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

# Market Cattle Testing

# **FOR BRUCELLOSIS**



PA 434

# U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# Market Cattle Testing

## FOR BRUCELLOSIS

### **What is market cattle testing?**

This is a method of screening market cattle for brucellosis—by testing blood samples drawn at markets, assembly points or packing plants. This screening method reduces the need for drawing blood samples at the farm or ranch. This program was originally designed to meet the needs of cattlemen in range and semi-range areas. However, it is also proving to be a valuable brucellosis eradication method in non-range areas.

Test results—credited back to herd and county of origin—can be used for both initial certification and recertification of areas.

### **How does it work?**

The program consists of five basic steps:

- Female cattle over 3 years old that are marketed are identified with a special back-tag at the ranch or farm or at assembly points on the way to market.
- Blood samples are collected from tagged animals at livestock markets, packing plants or other designated points.
- Blood samples are then forwarded to a cooperative State-Federal laboratory where they are tested for brucellosis.
- Test results are forwarded to disease control officials in the State where the cattle originated.
- Negative animals are credited to herds and areas of origin. When blood tests indicate infection is present, State and Federal animal disease officials and veterinarians work directly with the owner until the disease is eradicated.

## **Who may take part?**

Any cattleman in a county or other designated area where the market cattle testing program is in operation. You can get information on the program from your State or Federal veterinarian or from your county agent.

## **What cattle are tested under this plan?**

Only female cattle 3 years of age or older are back-tagged and tested.

## **Why aren't younger cattle tested?**

Because older animals in the herd are most likely to be infected.

## **Can a county be recertified as a modified-certified brucellosis area on the basis of market cattle testing results?**

Yes. A county can be recertified for a period of 3 years under this plan if at least 5 percent of all breeding cows in the county are backtagged and tested each year for 3 years, or a total of 15 percent over the 3-year period. In addition, at least 80 percent of the heifer calves retained in your area each year must be vaccinated. Vaccination is not required in strictly range areas where winter feeding is not practiced. However, a high level of calf vaccination is recommended in all herds.

## **How about initial certification?**

Counties can now be initially certified as modified-certified brucellosis areas under the market cattle testing program.



## **Just how does market cattle testing work for initial certification?**

Every herd in an area must qualify in order for that area to be initially certified. The four methods of qualification are: (1) complete herd blood test; (2) blood test of a representative sample of breeding cows over 3 years old; (3) milk ring tests, with follow-up blood tests of suspicious herds; and (4) market cattle testing.

For a herd to qualify under market cattle testing, at least 15 percent of the breeding cows over 3 years of age must be tested during a period of not less than 18 months. Those herds not participating in the market cattle testing plan will be tested under one of the other methods during the time of initial county certification.

## **Are there any other requirements if I use market cattle testing for initial certification?**

Yes. Vaccination of replacement heifer calves must be practiced at a level determined by State and Federal regulatory officials in consultation with cattle owners in your area.

## **What is the purpose of the backtags?**

These tags, made of a tough plastic material, are imprinted with a combination of numbers and letters which identify the State, county and herd of origin of animals shipped to market.

## **How and where are the tags applied to animals?**

This varies from State to State. In some States, the farmer or rancher applies the tags just before



the animals are shipped to market. In other States tags are not applied until the animals arrive at a livestock market or concentration point. In any event, a tag is cemented on each animal. The tag is applied to either side, just back of the shoulder and about 4 inches below the back line.

### **Where can I get these tags?**

If you are in a State where backtags are applied at the farm or ranch, you can get tags, and tubes of cement for applying them, from your State or Federal veterinarian. In some States, tags are available from your county agent or brand inspector. Your local county agent can tell you where to obtain tags.

### **How do I report on the tags I use?**

Reporting systems will vary from one State to another. Check with State or Federal officials, or your county agent, for details on how to report the tags you use. In all cases report your use of backtags immediately to make sure you receive proper credit for the animals you have tagged and shipped. Usually, use of backtags is reported by sending a prepaid post card to your State or Federal veterinarian, telling the date and place the cattle were shipped, and the numbers of the tags you used.

### **Can I ship tagged animals to any market I choose?**

Yes. All Federally inspected packing plants—and many under State and other forms of inspection—are cooperating in the market cattle testing program.





### **Will all animals I tag and ship to market be blood tested?**

All tagged animals shipped to cooperating markets and packing plants will be tested and the results credited to your herd. However, reactors found more than 14 days after they leave your ranch will not be charged to your herd. When the owner requests that blood samples be taken at the ranch, animals should not be tagged. Where blood samples are gathered at livestock markets, or at other assembly points, all tagged animals over 3 years of age will be tested.

### **Who collects the blood samples?**

Blood samples will be taken by Federal or State meat inspection personnel when animals are sent to these packing plants. In other participating plants, trained personnel will obtain the samples. Veterinarians collect samples at livestock markets or other assembly points.

### **Who makes the actual blood test?**

Actual testing will be done by qualified technicians at cooperative State-Federal laboratories in all States.

### **If reactors are found among the animals tested, how will they be traced?**

Numbers on the tags you use will be recorded for your herd. Since these numbers are not issued

to any other owner, animals bearing a particular number can easily be traced to the State, county, and herd where they originated.

### **What happens if reactors are found among the cows I ship to market?**

State and Federal veterinarians will discuss test results with you and the best ways to remove infection from your herd.

### **If reactors are found among the cattle I ship to market, must I blood test my entire herd?**

This depends on a number of factors—length of time that has elapsed from the time animals leave your place until they are tested, number of reactors found, whether or not brucellosis has previously been found in your herd, whether or not the reactors were official calfhood vaccines, on the size of your herd, and whether or not recent additions have been made to the herd.

### **If my herd is infected, what alternatives do I have?**

You may select one of the following plans:

- You may test your entire breeding herd.
- If your herd is small—50 or fewer animals—the entire herd will be tested. If your herd is larger than 50 animals you may blood test a representative sample. (Your State or Federal veterinarian can give you the exact number to be tested, based on your herd size.)
- You can choose to vaccinate all eligible calves and blood test all cattle over 3 years old moving from your herd for a period of 4 years. If enough cattle have been tested to provide the required representative sample and no reactors have been found during this period, your herd will then be considered brucellosis-free. If blood tests of marketed animals reveal further infection, a complete herd blood test will be required.

### **What do I gain by taking part in this program?**

By vaccinating your calves and backtagging your market cattle, you can be sure that your herd is brucellosis-free. This method of screening your cattle also gives you continuing assurance that infection has not been introduced into

your herd. And if infection is present, it can be located easily and can be quickly eliminated—before it has a chance to spread.

By participating in the market cattle program, you can help certify—or recertify—your county without additional on-the-farm or ranch tests except in known infected herds. This will save you time and money, help to establish—or maintain—your area's modified-certified status with less work and cost, and contribute to the eradication of brucellosis. Market cattle testing can also be used to help establish and maintain certified brucellosis-free areas.

**If I participate in the market cattle testing program, will I have to have animals tested on my farm or ranch also?**

No. The only time this would happen would be if reactors were traced to your herd and, after a review of the history of your herd, it was considered to be affected with brucellosis. Or, in case of initial certification of your area, if you have failed to market and backtag at least 15 percent of your breeding cows during a period of not less than 18 months.

**How does market cattle testing affect the amount of on-farm or ranch testing required for recertification?**

Actual field trials show that in beef producing areas, on-the-ranch blood testing is required in only about 3 herds in 100. In other words, market cattle testing eliminates 97 percent of the on-the-ranch testing required under alternate methods of recertification.

**If I backtag my cattle, does this eliminate me from on-the-ranch tests?**

Yes. If not enough cattle are tested through market cattle testing to recertify an area, additional on-the-ranch tests will be conducted on only those herds which have not participated in the market cattle testing program.

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